PLASTICS TO PLAY KEY ROLE IN ACHIEVING NEW AUTO FUEL EFFICIENCY (“CAFE”) STANDARDS

ANN ARBOR, MI (February 12, 2013) – Plastics industry leaders today established for a committee of the National Academies of Science’s National Research Council (NRC) that lightweight plastics and plastics composites are essential to helping automotive OEMs meet stringent new corporate average fuel economy, or CAFE, standards of 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025.

The NRC Committee on Fuel Economy of Light-Duty Vehicles, Phase 2, has been charged with determining the feasibility of meeting CAFE targets, and today met with representatives of the plastics, steel and aluminum industries to discuss factors related to meeting the new standards, including mass reduction, costs, benefits, lead time, technologies, ease of implementation and economic implications.

Representatives from the plastics industry emphasized modern lightweight materials, such as plastics and plastics composites, can significantly lessen the load on a vehicle’s engine, which increases mileage and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

“Innovations in plastics and plastics composites have produced a range of lightweight materials that are stronger, more impact resistant and offer more versatility than ever before,” said Keith Christman, managing director of plastics markets for the American Chemistry Council.

“The plastics industry is committed and vested in research that is providing an array of options to help OEMs deliver enhancements in fuel efficiency, safety and performance,” Christman said, adding that the plastics industry’s support will continue.

The 2012 National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) study: “Investigation of Opportunities for Lightweighting Vehicles using Advanced Plastics and Composites” on the 2007 Chevy Silverado pickup truck showed 952 pounds of mass can be saved principally by using lightweight plastics and composites available today. The study also documented comparable crash performance was maintained in the lightweighted vehicle.

“The technology is here, the costs reasonable, and the benefits real,” said Christman.

Currently manufacturers in 45 states use over 5.7 billion pounds (Source: Townsend Solutions) of plastics annually to create innovative vehicle parts and components, and the use of plastics in vehicles continues to climb.
The information and research findings on plastics in vehicles presented to the NRC committee are available here.

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